

Weblink 1: Letter of Protest to the Chancellor

The Chancellor
The Hon Justice Kim Santow OAM
June 24 2003

Dear Chancellor,

I was dismayed to receive in today's mail an invitation to attend the launch of the Graduate School of Government on the 30th June in the Senate Room, where the Hon Nick Greiner AC will be formally appointed as chair of the School's Advisory Council at an occasion attended by the Premier Bob Carr.

Mr Greiner is the long standing chairman of British American Tobacco (Australia). As such, he has the final responsibility for the policies and goals of that company, which are of course to maximize tobacco use in Australia. If he succeeds in this ambition, these policies will result in the avoidable and premature and often painful deaths of tens if not hundreds of thousands of Australians over the next few years. The federal government has stated that tobacco smoking is the leading cause of preventable death in Australia, with some 19,000 annual attributable deaths, approximately 4200 occurring in people aged less than 65 years. Last month the World Health Assembly unanimously endorsed the world's first legally binding convention on health, the Framework Convention on Tobacco Control, which aims to reduce the devastation caused by activities of the tobacco industry around the world.

In the midst of this, the appointment of Mr Greiner to this prestigious position in the University, is deeply insensitive and likely to bring discredit to the University.

The University of Sydney, since 1982, has shown admirable leadership in institutional ethics when the Senate decreed that no staff member of the University should be permitted to accept research money or any other form of endowment from any tobacco company. The University has a campus-wide policy prohibiting smoking in indoor environments, a policy that British American Tobacco has worked strenuously to discredit and undermine in many work and hospitality industry settings throughout the world.

I appreciate that Mr Greiner is not being appointed to his position in the Graduate School of Government because of his connection with the tobacco industry. However, his high level of involvement with that industry is unavoidable in considering whether he is an appropriate person to be honoured with such an office within the University. This appointment sends a plain message to the community that the University of Sydney considers that a person having governance of a tobacco company is an appropriate person to be honoured by the University. I believe many of our staff, students and alumni would be offended by this situation.

As professor of public health, I teach annual courses to both the university's medical students and to postgraduate students of public health on tobacco control. A major part of the material that I teach concerns ways that the tobacco industry efforts to "normalize" its commercial ambitions can be discredited so that governments become more disposed to introducing serious control measures designed to reduce tobacco use in the community and the toll death and disease caused by it.

In August I will be honoured at a world conference in Helsinki by my international peers with the American Cancer Society's Luther Terry Award for international individual leadership in tobacco control. I trust that you can appreciate that it will be inappropriate for me to somehow pretend that this embarrassing and ill considered appointment has not been made in my own university.

I'm writing to you to protest this decision in the strongest possible terms, and to advise that I will be informing staff, medical and public health students about the launch with the hope that they will join me in making an appropriate expression of their great disappointment at this decision.

As a person who has devoted the major part of my career to service to the University, I deeply regret having to write this letter and to advise that I cannot in good faith remain silent about this appointment.

I would be pleased to discuss this with you at your convenience.

Kind regards

Simon Chapman